

# Semantics of Prepositional Resultative Phrases in English (Summaries of the Papers Read at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Tsukuba English Linguistic Society)

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## Semantics of Prepositional Resultative Phrases in English

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In this research, we are concerned with the occurrence of two sorts of resultative phrases in resultative constructions: *in* resultative phrases and *into* resultative phrases (henceforth *in* RPs and *into* RPs for short). As a number of scholars point out, resultative constructions can be divided into two types: constructions including a verb which specifies the coming about of a result state (i.e. result verbs) or: ones including a verb specifying as only part of their meaning a manner of carrying out an action (i.e. manner verbs). We will call the former type constructions Verb-type(s) and the latter type Argument Structure Construction type(s), as Iwata (2008) defines, respectively (henceforth V-types and ASC-types).

Folli and Ramchand (2005) argue that *into* RPs (e.g. *into pieces*) can occur in both V-types and ASC-types, whereas *in* RPs (e.g. *in pieces*) are compatible with only the former types. This is exemplified in (1):

- (1) a. John broke the vase {into / in} pieces.
- b. John pounded the metal {into / \*in} pieces.

(1a) falls into the V-types in terms of the verb *break* classified as a result verb, while (1b) falls into the ASC-types because the verb *hammer* involved is classified as a manner verb. As seen above, *in pieces* is acceptable only in (1a), but not in (1b).

However, there is a case where *in* RPs are acceptable in ASC-types. Observe the following examples, all from BNC.

- (2) a. The vase was hammered in two pieces.
- b. The glass was shot in pieces.

Although the sentences in (2) are classified as ASC-types because of the existence of the manner verbs *hammer* and *shoot*, *in* RPs do occur in them. Thus, *in* RPs can occur in ASC-types if they are passivized. To the best of my knowledge, there is no study that accounts for this phenomenon.

The purpose of this research is to elucidate the reason why *in* RPs can occur in passivized ASC-types from semantic and pragmatic perspectives. We propose that (i) *in* RPs profile only the result (final) state of an event including change of state while *into* RPs profile not only it but also the process of the change of state, and (ii) passivized ASC-types involve stative readings, in which the process is backgrounded and only the result state is profiled. Based on our proposal, we shall

conclude that, since the profiling of *in* RPs is not inconsistent with the stative readings of passivized ASC-types, *in* RPs are licensed to occur in them.

As seen above, *in* RPs typically does not occur in ASC-types even if they denote a state extremely analogous to one denoted by *into* RPs. So we must take into consideration a semantic difference between *in* phrases and *into* phrases. As an approximation for it, we outline the semantic difference between the two phrases in motion expressions.

It has been said that the sentence *he walked in the room* can be interpreted as a translational motion as well as *he walked into the room* under some conditions (cf. Nikitina (2008) and Tutton (2009), among others). As Nikitina (2008) points out, however, there is a subtle semantic difference between them: *in* phrases profile only the goal of a translational motion, while *into* phrases profile not only it but also the process of the motion. This is designated by (3):

- (3) a. [Standing just outside of the room]  
John walked in the room.
- b. \* [Standing down the hallway from the room]  
John walked in the room.
- c. \* [Standing just outside of the office]  
John walked into the office.
- ((3a, b): Levin et al. (2009:16), (3c): Beavers (2004:6))

In (3a) and (3c) the contexts guarantee the punctuality of the event in which John moves from the outside of the room to the inside. The *in* phrase in (3a) is compatible with these contexts but the *into* phrase in (3c) is not, because *in* itself does not profile the process while *into* does. In addition, (3b) is judged as unacceptable because, despite the context guaranteeing the process of John's moving from the outside to the inside, the PP in itself does not profile the process. Consequently, Nikitina concludes that *in* profiles only the goal of a translational motion while *into* profiles not only it but also the process of the motion.

Given Nikitina's analysis above, we can assume that *in* RPs profile only the result state of an event which includes change of state, whereas *into* RPs profile not only it but also the process of the change of state. This assumption can be confirmed by the following three types of evidence. First, *in* RPs cannot occur in a context which evokes the process of change of state. Observe the following examples.

- (4) a. With multiple strokes, John broke the vase {into / \*in} pieces.

- b. The one hundred-story building collapsed {into / \*in} pieces by that great explosion.

The context created by *with multiple strokes* in (4a) and the information of the subject NP *the one hundred-story building* in (4b) invokes the process of the event. The RP *into pieces* is consistent with these types of knowledge. The RP *in pieces*, on the other hand, is not compatible with them.

Then, resultative constructions with *in* RPs are inconsistent with the progressive forms, as in (5):

- (5) a. Look! John is breaking the mug into pieces.  
b. ?? Look! John is breaking the mug in pieces.

In general, the progressive form represents a durative event in which the process of the event is mainly focused. Here again, *the RP in pieces* is unacceptable.

Finally, resultative constructions with *into* RPs are acceptable to be followed by a context denoting the cancellation of the result state, whereas ones with *in* RPs are not. This is designated by (6):

- (6) John cut the steak {into / \*in} pieces for his son, but in fact the pieces of steak were still joined to each other because he was not good at using a knife.

In (6) the former sentence represents the event of John's cutting the steak into pieces, and the latter cancels the result state of the steak. Given our proposal that *into* RPs profile both the process and the result state of change of state whereas *in* RPs profile only the latter, it naturally follows that *into* RPs are consistent with a context of the cancellation but *in* RPs are not. Thus, these three types of evidence strongly support the validity of our proposal (i).

We now turn to a function of passive sentences. As is well known, passive sentences may involve the state-process ambiguity (e.g. Langacker (1982), among others). Observe the following examples, cited from Nakau (1997:740):

- (7) a. The tree was uprooted.  
b. The tree was uprooted when I saw.  
c. The tree was uprooted by the storm.

(7a) is ambiguous between the readings indicated by (7b) and (7c). (7b) designates

only the final state in the process of uprooting, and is therefore stative in an obvious sense: but (7c) denotes all the states within the process. We call the former interpretation “stative (reading)” and the latter “processual (reading)”. It is said that in the stative reading the process is backgrounded and only the result state is profiled.

Interestingly, passivized resultative constructions with *in* RPs involve only stative readings, whereas those with *into* RPs involve only processual readings. This is supported by at least two types of evidence. The first is with the occurrence of the agentive *by* phrase (e.g. *The vase was broken {??in / into} pieces by John.*). It is said that the agentive *by* phrase focuses on the action of an event rather than the final state: that is, it evokes the processual rather than the stative.

Another type of evidence is shown in (8).

- (8) a. What happened then? The vase was hammered {into/??in} pieces.
- b. What was the vase like? The vase was hammered {??into/in} pieces.

According to Osawa (2009:228), the question *what happened (then)?* asks what event occurred. An answer to the question is necessarily an event-reporting sentence. In contrast, the question *what was X like?* asks what state the referent of *X* was in. An answer to the question must be a state-reporting sentence, in which the process of an event is not involved. As shown in (8), the passivized resultative construction with *in pieces* is felicitous to be used as an answer to the question in (8b) but not in (8a): that is, it describes only the result (final) state of an event. Consequently, it has only the stative reading; hence our proposal (ii).

Given the lexical semantic property of *in* and the function of passive form, we can give an account of the reason why *in* RPs can occur in ASC-types which are passivized. As statements above demonstrate, passivized ASC-types involve stative readings, in which the process of change of state is backgrounded and only the result state is profiled. In the readings, the passivized ASC-types are consistent with *in* RPs since they profile only the result state of change of state. Thus, *in* RPs which profile the result state are licensed to occur in them.

In conclusion, we have elucidated the factors which enables *in* RPs to occur in ASC-types, and we have proposed two factors as follows: (i) lexically-semantically, *in* only profiles the result state of an event including change of state while *into* profiles not only it but also the process, and; (ii) passivized ASC-types may involve the stative readings, where the process is backgrounded and only the result state is profiled. Since in these readings only the result state is profiled, *in* RPs are acceptable to occur, as in (2). The acceptability of these sentences is reducible to the interaction between lexical semantics and a function of the passive form.